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A Special Study in Portuguese

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A SPECIAL STUDY
IN
PORTUGUESE

BY
KEN
BROWN

UNDER
MR. JACK ESTES

A STUDY OF PORTUGUESE

The Idea

Language is a wonderfully complex medium into which we project ourselves and through which we communicate, forming interpersonal relationships. It is an ever-evolving matrix which is as concise and as ambiguous as the human mind from which it originates.

The writer of this paper is somewhat of a ployglot, having basic knowledge of Spanish, French, and Koine Greek, and yet not having extensive training in any except the last.

In view of personal developments, a general interest in language, and curiosity for the international, a special study was arranged with the head of the language department, Mr. Jack Estes. The purpose of this study was: (1) to learn as much Portuguese as possible before a transatlantic trip to Angola (Portuguese West Africa) via Rio de Janeiro. (2) to experiment with a different learning technique.

The Plan

Ouachita has no official qualified instructors in Portuguese. Yet there are several international students and "MK's" who speak the language quite well. The idea was conceived of rooming with a Brazilian, learning directly from him correct pronunciation and patterns of colloquial expressions.

This would also give me the chance to learn attitudes, concepts, feelings, and outlooks from an international.

Paulo Barbosa of Rio de Janeiro was asked to stay for the Spring semester as my roommate.

The initial book used was a textbook sent from Angola entitled "Aprendo Portugues" and was written on approximately the fourth grade level. Finding this book insufficient for reasons to be discussed later, a change was made to Berlitz' Self-Teaching Book of Portuguese. Finally a text arrived from Africa entitled Brazilian Portuguese, Grammar which was by far the best suited of all to be used. Used continually was a workbook which paralleled the first text and of the same title which provided the much needed opportunity to work, writing and reading simple Portuguese.

Practical Obstacles

The first obstacle was that of obtaining a good text. For obvious reasons Portuguese texts do not abound in Arkadelphia or in Arkansas. The first text tried was sent from Angola, by Harrison Pike, Southern Baptist Missionary Luanda, Angola. The text proved too elementary for serious study by college students. Also the Portuguese in the text was more of the Lisbon vintage than the Carioca style of Rio, which my roommate spoke. Finding a self-teaching grammar of a more sophisticated style and more nearly Brazilian, I worked for several weeks. However, since the book was not mine (and was asked for by the owner) and since the book had an approach that did not delineate grammar very well, I turned to another book which arrived from Angola with about

seven weeks left in the semester. This text was excellent. A good grammatical, oral combination approach.

Another problem encountered was the difference between Portuguese Portuguese, Brazilian Portuguese, and the pronunciation patterns of the spoken Brazilian Portuguese. A good example is the word for the color purple...roxo. Pronounced in very correct style the "r" sounds like the Spanish "r" only somewhat softer. The Carioca style, the style of Rio, pronounces the "r" as an aspirated "h". Compounding the problem is the fact that the "d" before "e" or "i" is pronounced as a "j" as in "jump". There are other differences between textbook and spoken Portuguese which provide for a confusing situation.

Another problem was one of the drawbacks of practical knowledge as over against grammatical understanding. Often Paulo could not tell me when to use certain constructions rather than other seemingly correct constructions. He could show me specifics but knew no rules to guide me. One Brazilian who helped me more than any is Tony da Mota, who taught English in Brazil, and who understands both teaching technique and both languages.

In Comparison

If any one word could describe the texture of the Portuguese language, FLUID might be the appropriate word. Portuguese has a much softer consonant system and a wide use of nasalized vowel sounds. There are many words which contain the "til" (~) which is the equivalent of the French

nasal sound. Besides the fact that many nouns, verbs, and articles end with a nasal quality due to the "til", and not a clear cut consonant termination, there are many words which end in -en, -an, -am, ~~or~~ em which trail off into a semi-nasalized enunciation.

These peculiar characteristics make linking extensive; consequently, it is hard for the novice to distinguish words. French has a great deal of this linking, also.

In conclusion, one can only learn the basics of the language in one semester, just enough to ask the location of a phone booth, a hotel, or the airport. It's always a good idea to have a handy phrase ready and well memorized. Fala devagar por favor; porque eu não falo Portugues muito bem, mas eu estou tentando aprender.